



A Japanese stuck mom's story

A burned female body was found on 29th of January in an apartment in Budapest. The victim, a Japanese woman who had been living in Budapest for years and raising her two young children alone, sought legal assistance from PATENT Association, a Hungarian women's right organisation, in 2023. She was terrified of her ex-husband, who had abused her for a long time, and wanted to return to her home country, Japan, with her children. However, the father did not consent to this, despite not residing in Hungary himself. So, she was stuck in Hungary.

After her death, authorities initially ruled the incident as an accidental fire, finding no signs of foul play. However, her friends and her lawyer from PATENT Association raised significant public pressure, demanding that the police reopen the case. They were convinced it was not an accident.

A few days later, police announced that new CCTV footage had prompted them to reconsider the case, leading to the detention of the ex-husband as a suspect. His arrest has since been initiated. Additionally, the Budapest Police Headquarters (BRFK) launched an internal investigation to determine why the victim's previous reports were dismissed by local law enforcement.

Legal Battles and the Hague Convention's Impact

Júlia Spronz, a lawyer from PATENT Association, had been in touch with the victim until December 31, 2024. Spronz has provided further details on the case while also highlighting systemic issues in Hungary's judicial system.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the victim and her then-husband had agreed that she would travel to Japan with their children. At the last moment, he prevented her from taking their son, allowing her to leave only with their daughter. Shortly afterward, he filed a case against her under The Hague Abduction Convention, alleging that she had unlawfully taken their daughter. Meanwhile, he misled both his social circle and the child left behind, claiming that the mother had abandoned them.

This situation, according to Hague Mothers, a group under the international women's rights organization FiLiA, is all too common. They report that 75% of Hague Convention cases are filed against mothers, with domestic violence playing a role in a significant portion of these cases.

Years of Abuse and Ignored Reports

The victim had confided in her friends and PATENT Association about previous abuse at the hands of her ex-husband. In one particularly violent incident, he had strangled her so forcefully that she feared for her life. However, she refrained from pressing charges, fearing that legal action would only escalate his aggression. Her unfamiliarity with the language and legal system also deterred her from engaging with law enforcement. Instead, she sought to finalize the divorce as quickly as possible.

Despite her reluctance to engage with law enforcement, the victim eventually reported two incidents to the police. The first was when her ex-husband stole her laptop and misused it. The second was after she received a direct death threat from him via email. Yet, in both cases, authorities refused to act, dismissing her complaints.

The System's Failure to Recognize Psychological Abuse

According to Spronz, domestic violence is not always physical. Psychological and coercive control—where one partner systematically manipulates and exerts power over the other—can be just as damaging. In cases where one person persistently dominates decision-making, making the other's life unbearable, it constitutes abuse.

While Hungarian law permits restraining orders for psychological abuse, they are rarely granted. Given the circumstances, Spronz believes the ex-husband's threats alone should have warranted an investigation. Hungarian law states that making threats to incite fear constitutes criminal harassment, yet authorities failed to take the victim's situation seriously.

Lack of Protection for Victims, Especially Foreign Nationals

According to Spronz, almost every domestic violence-related homicide follows a pattern: victims or their loved ones have already sought help, yet law enforcement fails to act.

"Our experience shows that women are at the bottom of the priority list for police, especially when the abuser is their current or former partner," she explains. Even when cases are handled, authorities often downplay the danger until it is too late.

For foreign women living in Hungary, the situation is even worse. Spronz highlights that police and courts are often unwilling to engage with victims who do not speak Hungarian. When M. filed her reports, a friend had to accompany her to act as a translator. Another client, an American woman, was denied a restraining order simply because the police refused to communicate with her in English”

Detailed story in English:

<https://telex.hu/english/2025/02/04/expat-mother-who-died-in-house-fire-in-budapest-had-be-en-living-in-fear-for-a-long-time> (Dóra Patakfalvi, Andrea Horváth Kávai)



Protest:

Following her death, over 30 women, who have been her friends or acquaintances, together with Patent Association, organized a [memorial](#), [followed by a protest](#).

According to Patent’s official statement, the demonstration aimed to raise awareness about the systemic nature of violence against women, the general negligence and lack of preparedness of the authorities in handling such cases. (picture by Laura Songoro)

The protestors marched from Stollár Béla Street to Szalay Street (Budapest) and then reached Kossuth Square by 4 PM. According to on-site reporters, close to a thousand people had gathered in front of the Parliament shortly after 4 PM. Patent’s activists read stories of women who had suffered abuse and were ignored by the police.

The petition issued by Patent states that instead of an apology, they demand real change:

“We want a woman in danger to no longer be invisible to the authorities. We want a woman crying for help to no longer fear being met with indifference. We want the police to act before it’s too late—not at the last possible moment, when tragedy has already struck.”



Picture by József Tinn